LET'S MAKE THEM HEAR IT IN EUROPE

The Sound of Banging Pots and Pans, the Internet and Networked Protest

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ABSTRACT

The internet and social media are radically changing the very nature of protests in the modern world, allowing people to connect and exchange information through new channels previously unavailable and in virtual rather than physical spaces. As music and sounds have long been an important factor in the way social movements are born, received and remembered, they too are disseminated more widely by this technology and help to motivate protests both online and offline. Through virtual fieldwork and interviews with members of London-based Chilean protest group *Asamblea Chilena en Londres*, I track the sound of *cacerolazo*—a form of popular protest involving banging pots and pans. I explore how this noise challenges and defies space, is mediated and disseminated through social media and the internet and connects individuals and communities, mobilising them both locally and globally.

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KEYWORDS:

Cacerolazo; networked protest; 2019 Chilean protests; social media; sound studies, noise.

INTRODUCTION

On November 13, 2019, a friend and I went to see Chilean cumbia band Chico Trujillo play in London. We wanted to relive the memories of our time working in Chile, where the band's irreverent style of music was the vibrant soundtrack to many family events and parties. However, this concert seemed different. There was a highly politicised atmosphere in the room with concert-goers dressed in Chilean flags chanting and demanding that their president Sebastian Piñera resign. The lights dimmed and piped in through a speaker, a cacophony of banging pots flooded the room as the band entered to great applause. The atmosphere only intensified throughout the performance as the group played various political songs from Chile's history, such as Victor Jara's "*The Right to Live in Peace*" and Quilapayún's "*The People United Will Never be Defeated*".

It was also at this concert where I became aware of *Asamblea Chilena en Londres* —A London-based protest group that aims to make Chile's problems visible to the UK and the wider world. At the end of the performance, they gathered onstage in front of a large black Chilean flag splattered in fake blood. Wearing bloody eye patches, they denounced the acts of the Chilean government and militarised police force who had shot and blinded protesters in the eye during the ongoing protests. The crowd responded with cheers. This concert took place during the most intense moment of the 2019 Chilean protests which were sparked in October by a 30 peso rise in public transport fares.[429] Following this, protesters started to jump over the subway barriers to enter the subway system for free and began destroying its facilities. An increasingly violent police force tried to suppress street demonstrations but was met with even more resistance, and although the president decided to retract the fare increase, he had unleashed a movement that demanded a complete change in the country.

The only way I have come to know about these protests is through the internet and social media, which have also been defining factors in their manifestation. The importance of social media and its ability to change the nature of modern-day protest has also started to

[429] Charis McGowan, "Chile Protests: What Prompted the Unrest?," *Al Jazeera*, October 30, 2019, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/10/chile-protests-prompted-unrest-191022160029869.html.

receive more scholarly attention. In her book *Twitter and Tear Gas* (2017), techno-sociologist Zeynep Tufekci studies its role in the Arab Spring and its power as a tool that could "overcome censorship, coordinate protests, organise logistics, and spread humour and dissent."[430] She explores how such technology allows for people to mobilise without relying on formal leaders, hierarchies or traditional organisational structures, instead offering the possibility of a new style of protest that can increase participation both on and offline.[431] As beneficial as these new means of communication may be for networked protest, she also recognises that they inevitably bring new problems: social media and the internet can just as easily be subjected to government control and surveillance or can be intentionally subverted with the posting of misinformation to confuse online coordination.[432]

Noriko Manabe's *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised* (2015) focuses on Japanese anti-nuclear demonstrations and deals with similar themes. However, noting that music and cultural materials have a long history in bolstering social movements, she brings these into the debate. She contends that in Japan, both the internet and music offered new channels for expression as the "combination of potential anonymity in cyberspace and the expressivity of music helped citizens to overcome the spiral of silence and raise their voices against nuclear power."[433] Given that protest, music, and now the internet and social media are complexly linked, they offer us a framework for exploring the ways that information and sounds can cut across space and connect people in new, sometimes unpredictable ways.

Following Tufekci and Manabe, I want to look at the internet and social media's technological affordances—"the action a given technology facilitates or make possible."[434] Focusing on the sound of banging pots and pans heard at the concert, I will ask: How have the internet and social media facilitated the journey of this sound? And how were the sounds of banging pots and pans imbued with meaning along the way, managing to

[430] Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2017), xxii.
[431] Ibid., xxiii–xxiv.
[432] Ibid., xxvii–xxviii.
[433] Noriko Manabe, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised: Protest Music After Fukushima* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 4.
[434] Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*, xi.

mobilise protesters both locally and globally? Also borrowing ideas about noise and noise-making from sound studies, I attempt to track the sound's flow in a somewhat chronological order from its production in Chile, its transmission and mediation through the internet, its effect in protests in London, and finally, its circulation back to Chile.

I have engaged in virtual fieldwork, specifically sifting through posts, videos and comments posted on Chilean local news Facebook group *Todos Somos Valparaíso* to track the sounds and the discourse surrounding them. I have also attended demonstrations with the protest group in London to witness the sounds in action and have interviewed the head organiser of their picketing team Tania Moraga, who has given consent for her name and comments to be used in this paper. She has provided me with invaluable information on the protests, the group's connection to the internet and social media, and the sounds that have shaped their cause. Throughout my research, although I have shown my friends and interlocutors support in their attempts to call for constitutional change in Chile, I have tried to maintain a largely observational standpoint at protests and have not interacted directly with social media posts online.

CACEROLAZO FROM PAST TO PRESENT

The term *cacerolazo* comes from the Spanish word for a casserole dish, *cacerola*, but has come to mean a popular form of protest where people strike pots and pans with wooden spoons. In Chile, the first recorded *cacerolazo* event was in 1971 and is now referred to as "The March of the Empty Pots," when conservative and mainly middle and upper-class housewives took to the streets, banging their empty pots and pans to protest against food shortages during the presidency of Salvador Allende's socialist government.[435] It was a way to make noise—which sound studies pioneer R. Murray Schaffer simply describes as "any undesired sound signal."[436] This noise dominates the quotidian soundscape in a paradoxically peaceful form of protest, in which anyone can participate—it takes little skill, and everyone has some sort of pot and an implement to hit it with. Also symbolic as the

[435] Jedrek Mularski, *Music, Politics, and Nationalism in Latin America: Chile During the Cold War Era*. Cambria Studies in Latin American Literatures and Cultures Series (Amherst, New York: Cambria Press, 2014), 210–11.
[436] R. Murray Schafer, *The New Soundscape: a Handbook for the Modern Music Teacher* (Don Mills, Ont: BMI Canada, 1969), 17.

voice of the common people, it did not come from radicals but the housewives and families who the food shortages directly affected.

Over time, this form of protest has managed to spread to Chile's neighbouring countries and further afield. It appeared during Argentina's period of civil unrest in 2001 as a way to express public anger at the government for the country's economic collapse.[437] In 2015, Brazilians employed *cacerolazo* to drown-out the then-president Dilma Rousseff's televised speech, as a way to call for her impeachment.[438] It has been used in movements ranging from the 2012 Quebec student protests to the 2013 Gezi Park demonstrations in Turkey and the 2009 Icelandic financial crisis, where *cacerolazo* became so emblematic of the demonstrations that it has been termed "The Pots and Pans Revolution."[439]

Even the Coronavirus pandemic that spread throughout the world in 2020 prompted a resurgence of this phenomenon. It reappeared in Brazil, where many performed *cacerolazo* in opposition to their president, Jair Bolsonaro's "economy first" approach to the handling of the crisis.[440] Whereas in the United Kingdom, it became a way to show solidarity rather than as a tool for protest. Every week, this sound joined the chorus of cheering and clapping as people showed their gratitude for the NHS and care workers' efforts to control the effects of the pandemic. It is partly due to the *cacerolazo*'s accessibility and its role as a surrogate voice for the common people that has helped it spread to other countries as a popular form of protest or solidarity.

But in Chile, *cacerolazo* has a particularly long history as a method to express dissatisfaction with the authorities and has resonated with many generations of protesters—from those during the Allende years to the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990) or

[437] Naomi Klein, "Out of the Ordinary," *The Guardian*, January 25, 2003, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jan/25/argentina.weekend7.
[438] Jonathan Watts, "Dilma Rousseff Stares Down the Spectre of Impeachment: 'The Question is Arithmetic'," *The Guardian*, August 13, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/aug/13/brazilians-protesting-president-dilma-rousseff-impeachment.
[439] Philip England, "Iceland's 'Pots and Pans Revolution': Lessons from a Nation that People Power Helped to Emerge from its 2008 Crisis All the Stronger," *The Independent*, June 28, 2015, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/icelands-pots-and-pans-revolution-lessons-from-a-nation-that-people-power-helped-to-emerge-from-its-10351095.html.
[440] Sam Cowie, "Deny and Defy: Bolsonaro's Approach to the Coronavirus in Brazil," *Al Jazeera*, March 30, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/deny-defy-bolsonaro-approach-coronavirus-brazil-200330181645501.html.

the 2011 student demonstrations, where activists used *cacerolazo* to demand educational reform. With such a long history, Chilean sociologist Nicolás Ortiz Ruiz notes that the act of banging pots and pans creates a historical narrative of resistance which not only emotionally connects activists but the general public.[441] He argues that during the 2011 protests when activists were met with police violence, it reawakened the collective memory of the violence committed during the dictatorship. This collective fear was then channelled and reinterpreted through *cacerolazo*, resonating with members of the public who, though not directly involved with the protests, ssympathised with the students' cause. It was the *cacerolazo*'s mnemonic content and ritual characteristic that resonated with the older generations, promoting support across wider sectors of society.

Returning to the 2019 Chilean protests, we see that *cacerolazo* still resonates with the public today. Due to the escalation of demonstrations, the government–imposed curfews for the first time since the dictatorship. People still wanted to protest, but the curfews meant that they could not do so in the street, so they organised *cacerolazos* through Facebook pages.[442] The plan was for individuals and families to perform *cacerolazo* from their houses so that the sound could flow from private to public space, filling the big cities with the unified sound of protest despite government restriction. They hoped to play so loudly that they could even be heard in Europe and encouraged participants to share videos and pictures on the page to create a virtual community of protesters.[443] Participants filmed videos of their individual efforts on their phones and subsequently posted them online, commenting and interacting with other protesters and with some even posting photos of broken pans to show just how committed they were to the cause.

Within this, we see an attempt to reconfigure space, which is a concept that can be analysed through a variety of models. In the case of Japan, Manabe uses Lefebvre's trichotomy of space, which conceptualises it as a "physical, mental and social space,"[444] that is "controlled by structures of power and reimagined by users."[445] It comprises of *perceived space* (the

[441] Nicolás Ortiz Ruiz, "Cacerolazo: emociones y memoria en el movimiento estudiantil 2011," *Polis* 53 (2019): 1–13.
[442] See appendix, figure 1.
[443] See appendix, figure 2.
[444] Manabe, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, 15.
[445] ibid.

physical environment), *conceived space* (representations of space) that is regulated by hegemonic forces, and *lived-in space* (spaces of representation) which is "where people imagine new uses and meanings for space in contrast to the conceived space regulated by hegemonic forces."[446]

Applying this to the case of Chile, the *perceived space* is the roads, plazas and public spaces of the cities that are subject to the control of city planners, as they dictate the flows of people, where they can gather, communicate, and here, protest. This space was re-conceived by the government through imposing curfews, denying people a place to do so. However, Facebook allowed for an alternative virtual space that served the same functions as the conceived physical spaces did previously. Here, the *cacerolazos* acted as *spaces of representation* which allowed protesters to reimagine the controlled physical space. The sound challenged the power of the government and saturated the otherwise controlled physical space, as a result reclaiming it. Thus Facebook provided an alternative virtual space which facilitated the sound of banging pots and pans to flow undisturbed.

From Offline to Online/ from Online to Offline

In this we see what Tufekci refers to as a "digitally networked public sphere," which she uses as "a shorthand for this complex interaction of publics, online and offline, all intertwined, multiple, connected, and complex, but also transnational and global."[447] Social media was not just used to virtually coordinate physical protests, but also allowed people to interact and create their own discourse surrounding them, feeling that the media was not faithfully reporting the course of events. When interviewing Tania, the head of *Asamblea Chilena en Londres*' picketing team, she said that "the media is owned by the richest people in Chile. It's ridiculous but it's been like that forever". Even the current president owned one of Chile's main television channels *Chilevision* from 2005 to 2010. Tania is one of many young Chilean voices who have become disillusioned with the media's representation of protest activity. The news reports tend to focus on the vandalism and supermarket lootings

[446] Ibid., 16.
[447] Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*, 6.

done by the protesters, and such a lack of true coverage often "creates a significant challenge to activists in communicating their alternative views."[448]

However, Facebook again proved useful as it relies on "the power of network effects – the more people who use them, the more useful they are to people."[449] Given that Facebook is so widely used, people can connect more and more, which makes the platform more difficult for the government to shut down than an activist-only site. In addition, its design promotes sharing and devalues privacy, helping information to spread easily and quickly.[450]

People in the digitally networked public sphere filmed what was happening on the ground and shared their videos online. They showed what the news did not: videos of police brutality, peaceful demonstrations, moments of unity, personal stories, eye-witness accounts and opinions, which created a constantly expanding, diversifying and snowballing discourse online that was largely free from media bias. In this discourse, jokes and memes were spread and somebody even created a website called *iCacerola,*[451] which digitally recreates the sound of *cacerolazo* when you touch the pot icon on the screen, particularly useful for protesters who do not have access to physical pots or pans. The protest was just as online as offline.

On October 21, a mere two days after the first night of curfews, the domestically and internationally acclaimed Chilean rapper Ana Tijoux uploaded a short one-minute-long song on YouTube called "*Cacerolazo."*[452] In this, the sound of the *cacerolazo* underwent a process of dissociation called schizophonia, where the artist "split the sound from the makers of the sound."[453] It was transformed into a catchy repetitive rhythm, also reflected in the lyrics – "*cacerolazo, cacerolazo, cacerolazo, cace, cace, cacerolazo".* In performance, people usually choose to play different simple rhythms that often collide, creating the

[448] Manabe, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, 6.
[449] Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*, 20.
[450] Ibid., 13–20.
[451] https://www.icacerola.cl/.
[452] anamaria tijoux. "#CACEROLAZO – Ana Tijoux," YouTube video, 1:03, October 21, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVaTuVNN7Zs.
[453] Schafer, *The New Soundscape*, 43.

intended cacophony of noise, but here we hear a mediated schizophonic sound that manages to turn this noise into music.

The rap's lyrics speak of Chile's problems which the protests revolve around: the general price of living, including rent, gas and water bills; poor pension plans; lack of access to quality education; the privatisation of natural resources; media bias; and police brutality. The accompanying video employs these various video clips, photos and memes circulated by the digitally networked public sphere, and the video itself quickly gained traction online. Tania mentioned that Tijoux is a popular musician among the protesters because her music has always been committed to the common people, and this piece manages to channel the real message of the protests. In the song, she sums up the movement in one slick phrase: "*no son 30 pesos, son 30 años*"—"It's not 30 pesos, it's 30 years," which explains that the protests are not about the raising of public transportation fares, but about the lack of change in Chile since the dictatorship ended almost 30 years ago. It seemed to be the perfect phrase that summed up the movement, and whether Tijoux created the phrase herself or it came out of this ever-expanding discourse, the song clearly popularised it.

"Cyberspace is not hermetically isolated"[454]—what happens online "spills over into the real world."[455] Overnight, the song had re-captured the imaginations of the protesters and had spilt into the streets where it was played at physical demonstrations, and its popularised phrase was written across placards and banners. Ana Tijoux's "*Cacerolazo*" and its mediated sounds of banging pots and pans became the soundtrack to the movement itself. The root of its creation lies in the digitally networked public sphere, which provided visual materials, interaction free from bias and a new discourse. Tijoux managed to eloquently summarise the protests, detaching the noise from its source and turning it into music, which circulated online, and not only spilled back into the streets of Chile but to a wider audience given her international following and the piece's accessibility as music rather than noise.

[454] Manabe, *The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*, 110.
[455] Ibid.

From Chile to the World and Back Again

The internet can also "easily connect many people who are not in the same physical space, or even people who do not know each other at all."[456] It has been invaluable in bridging the gap between Chilean living abroad and their friends, family and native country in this tumultuous time. For example, when interviewing Tania, she told me that she had come to London temporarily to support her partner, who is studying at university. Due to the physical distance between her and her family and friends, she feels guilty that she cannot join in with the protests. However, she mentioned the internet helps her and others in similar situations connect: "For us, the internet is how we see everything and how we know everything. It's our connection with all the conflict. It's our connection with Chile."

The members of *Asamblea Chilena en Londres* have grown in numbers as many like-minded Chileans have used the internet and social media to find a community outside of their country. Tufekci calls this tendency to seek out people who are like themselves as 'homophily' which has been greatly facilitated by digital connectivity.[457] They don't have to live in the same physical spaces to communicate: now, "people may just need to find the right hashtag."[458] Tania recalled:

> So this huge thing happened in Chile, the military were out in the streets, and we were all thinking: "oh my god, it's like 1973 all over again." So the Assembly was born in that context; in that urgent need to get together, eager to do something. We didn't even think why. We have to get together and shout and scream.

She mentioned that the group larges comprises of two types of people: students and young workers like herself, who are only in London for a few years; and Chileans living in exile who

[456] Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas*, 6.
[457] Ibid., 9.
[458] Ibid.

have resided here since fleeing the military dictatorship. With them, they have brought two different methods of protesting. Many of the younger demonstrators were also involved in the 2011 Chilean student protests which saw the appearance of creative demonstration practices including flashmobs, viral campaigns and kiss-a-thons.[459] Given their experience, they prefer a more 'carnivalesque' style of protesting, employing music, chants, visuals and spectacle. On the other hand, the older generation prefers to go to the embassy every day and just shout, in that way expressing their anger.

To satisfy both internal groups, they have employed a variety of protest tactics, including flash mobs at St Pancras train station and pickets outside the Chilean embassy. They have translated chants and songs into English so they can communicate their cause to the UK, but Tania mentions that it never really sounds the same. They've not got the same rhythm. However, they often perform *cacerolazos*, which avoids this detachment from feeling and words because no words are needed.

Novak mentions that noise can be both social and antisocial.[460] Here, we can see that *cacerolazo*'s social and carnivalesque nature appeals to the younger generation of protesters, while its ability to create a dominating, antisocial noise echoes the relentless shouting of the older protesters. Therefore, the performance of *cacerolazo* satisfies both groups' methods of protest and unifies them. They often perform these at iconic landmarks in London to raise awareness amongst the British population and tourists, but also to record videos, which they post on their Facebook page as, in the words of Tania, "energised messages of support" to Chile.[461] The landmarks clearly situate their protests, showing Chile that the world is listening.

Returning to the Facebook page that organised the *cacerolazo* under curfew – which demanded that they play so loudly that they are heard in Europe and encouraged people to post videos and photos – there was also a stream of support that came from Chileans living

[459] Cristián Cabalín, "Estudiantes conectados y movilizados: El uso de Facebook en las protestas estudiantiles en Chile," *Comunicar: Revista Científica iberoamericana de comunicación y educación* 43, no. 22 (2014): 28.
[460] David Novak, "Noise," in *Keywords in Sound*, edited by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2015), 125.
[461] https://www.facebook.com/asambleachilenapagina/.

abroad who posted messages, photos and videos to show that despite not being in the country, they too were participating in the protests.[462]

They were finally heard in Europe. However, it was not just the act of playing loudly, but the internet and social media that facilitated the sound to reach the world. Videos of solidarity protests from around the world were being uploaded to the now global digitally networked public sphere, attracting Chileans, non–Chileans, and even celebrities such as Roger Waters from Pink Floyd, who posted a video of himself on YouTube symbolically banging a pot in his back garden for one minute as a sign of support.[463]

On October 27, Ana Tijoux uploaded a longer version of "*Cacerolazo*" on YouTube.[464] This time, the video included the latest jokes and memes created and circulated online, and videos of international solidarity protests from Sydney, Paris, and even scuba divers at the bottom of the sea! This deterritorialised sound was now international.

On November 26, I attended my last protest on a quiet street in Mayfair, London. The group assembled outside the office of the Chilean mining company CODELCO in a protest to support the national strike occurring in Chile. After a rousing speech, Ana Tijoux's "*Cacerolazo*" was played from a large speaker directed at the company's window. The protesters quickly produced pots and pans of all different sizes from their rucksacks and began to strike. I was standing at the side, and embarrassed that I had not brought one, I reached for my phone, turned up the volume and played the sound of banging pots and pans through the *iCacerola* website. In that cacophony of sound, it seemed that the interactions between public/ private; virtual/ physical; online/ offline; people/ politics; governments/ citizens; noise/ music; local/ global; and past/ present were playing out in all their complexity.

[462] See appendix, figure 3.
[463] Roger Waters. "*CHILE*," YouTube video, 5:39, October 31, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nLBS7aYnhk.
[464] anamaria tijoux. "#CACEROLAZO – Ana Tijoux," YouTube video, 3:27, October 27, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lItbHicquo4.

Conclusion

In the past, "your voice only travelled as far as you could shout."[465] In the digital age, however, the internet alters space and allows for sounds to reach anywhere and everywhere. Sounds are "always in motion; they emulate, radiate, reflect, canalize, get blocked, leak out, and so on."[466] This has been demonstrated by the journey of the *cacerolazo*: the sound that started in 1971 by housewives protesting against food shortages resonated with current day protesters in Chile. Under curfews, Facebook allowed for an alternative virtual space to organise protests, and the sound of *cacerolazo* managed to flow from private space into public space, dominating the urban soundscape and simultaneously circulating online.

Here, a digitally networked public sphere was created, which facilitated an alternative discourse largely free from media bias. *Cacerolazo* was picked up by Ana Tijoux who moulded its noise into music and created a video from the circulated videos created in the discourse, which was again virtually circulated and then leaked back into physical space when it became a soundtrack for the movement and was performed in street protests.

The internet and social media helped the song reach the world, where it was performed in copy-cat demonstrations in big cities around the globe. In London, social media helped Chileans living abroad connect, and the performance of *cacerolazo* unified two generation's protesting methods, which were recorded and sent back into the virtual world. Joining with other messages of solidarity, they reached Chile and Chileans everywhere as a sign of support. The internet and social media have made this already loud sound louder, the space it dominates broader, and has rendered its significance more meaningful to even more people.

[465] Schafer, *The New Soundscape*, 43.
[466] Andrew Eisenberg, "Space." In *Keywords in Sound*, edited by David Novak and Matt Sakakeeny (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2015), 193.

APPENDIX

Facebook Screenshots

Figure 1.
"Curfew at 6 o'clock? It doesn't matter. Nation-wide cacerolazo at 8 o'clock. Let's make them hear it in Europe."
Todos Somos Valparaíso, "Toque de queda a las 18 hrs? No Importa." Facebook, October 22, 2019. https://www.facebook.com/Todos-somos-Valpara%C3%ADso-270353113142813/.

Figure 2.

"Cacerolazo. Leave your video or photo here."
Todos Somos Valparaíso, "Cacerolazo. Deja tu vídeo o foto acá." Facebook, October 22, 2019. https://www.facebook.com/Todos-somos-Valpara%C3%ADso-270353113142813/.

Figure 3.
"We hear you in Europe!" And messages of solidarity from Chileans in Spain, Puerto Rico, Canada and Belgium.

Todos Somos Valparaíso, "En Europa se escucha!" Facebook, October 22, 2019. https://www.facebook.com/Todos-somos-Valpara%C3%ADso-270353113142813/.

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